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COME-OUTERISM.

THE

DUTY OF SECESSION

FROM A

CORRUPT CHURCH.

BY WILLIAM GOODELL.

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JAMES G. BIRNEY has proved that the "American Church is the Bulwark of American Slavery," and Stephen S. Foster, that "the American church and clergy are a Brotherhood of Thieves." Having thus shown the American church to be corrupt, we present our friends with another link in the chain of argument, from the hand of William Goodell of Utica, being his well-known Essay on the "Duty of Secession from a Corrupt Church."

The American Anti-Slavery Society is frequently charged with being opposed to all church organizations. The charge has been again and again both denied and refuted. Those who care to know our views in regard to the churches of the country and the course we urge our members to adopt, will find them clearly defined in the following pages. Though we differ on other points, on this Mr. Goodell and ourselves are entirely agreed.

The very head and front of our offending
Hath *this* extent — NO MORE.

W. P.

DUTY OF SECESSION

FROM

A CORRUPT CHURCH.

‘Come out of her, my people, that ye partake not of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.’—Rev. xviii. 4.

Our Protestant commentators tell us that by the ‘BABYLON’ of the Apocalypse, we are to understand a CORRUPT CHURCH, and that the proclamation which John heard in heaven — ‘*Come out of her, my people,*’ is to be regarded as a divine admonition to all faithful Christians, warning them to secede from such a church, as from the ANTI-CHRIST, doomed to perdition, at the brightness of the Savior’s appearing.

It is true they suppose, that the corrupt church, particularly intended, is the church of Rome; but it is nevertheless equally true that their construction of the passage involves and is founded upon the PRINCIPLE, that *whenever* and *wherever* a church, (however distinguished, once, by the divine presence and favor) becomes corrupt and apostate, it is the duty of all true Christians connected with it, to secede from it, *because* it has thus apostatized, and is become corrupt. It has never been doubted that the church of Rome was once a true church, and the *reason* always given for coming out of her is her apostacy and corruption.

Nor is it pretended that the Romish church is the only corrupt, apostate, anti-Christian church that the world has yet seen, and that is now to be found. The Greek church has commonly been considered by Protestants to be essentially on the same foundation with the Romish. And both in Old England and New England, the founders of our present churches and denominational arrangements have repeatedly gone through the process of ‘gathering churches out of

churches,* on the same principle. The Puritans derived their name from their efforts to secure, in this way, a pure church. And if it be true, as it doubtless is, that secessions have often been made on *lighter* grounds than the alleged apostacy, and anti-Christian character of the church seceded from, that fact only places in a still stronger light the universal recognition, by Protestants, of the duty of seceding from an anti-Christian church. Indeed, to deny that duty would be equivalent to renouncing the Protestant faith, and would require our return to the Romish communion.

Our commentators, moreover, do not commonly construe the Babylon of the Revelations to mean *exclusively* the Romish church, nor do they *confine* the application of the command, in the text, to the Protestant reformers, nor to the duty of seceding from the Romish communion. Thomas Scott says, expressly :

‘This summons concerns *all persons in every age* ; they who believe in Christ, and worship God in the spirit, should separate from so corrupt a Church, AND FROM ALL OTHERS THAT COPY HER EXAMPLE of idolatry, persecution, CRUELTY and TYRANNY, and avoid being partakers of her sins, even if they have renounced her communion, or else they may expect to be involved in her plagues.’

In describing, still further, the anti-Christian practices, on account of which the Romish church, ‘and all others that copy her example,’ should be renounced, and separated from as corrupt and anti-Christian, the same writer adds :

‘Not only *slaves*, but the ‘*souls of men*,’ are mentioned as articles of commerce, which is the most infamous of all traffics that the demon of avarice ever devised, but by no means the most uncommon. The sale of indulgences, dispensations, absolutions, masses and bulls, hath greatly enriched the clergy and their dependants, to the deceiving and destroying the souls of millions, and thus by feigned words they made merchandize of them ; nor has the management of Church preferments and many other things, been any better than *trafficking in human souls* ; and it would be gratifying if *we could say that this merchandize has been peculiar to the ROMISH anti-Christ.*’

Again, in his ‘Practical Observations’ on the chapter, the same commentator says :

‘Too often INJUSTICE, OPPRESSION, fraud, avarice or excessive indulgence are connected with extensive commerce, and to *number the ‘persons of men’* with beasts, sheep and horses, as the stock of a farm, or with bales of goods, as the cargo of a ship, is, no doubt, a most detestable and *unchristian* practice, fit only for Babylon the Great.’

And, after alluding again to those who ‘traded in the souls of men,’ in the way of ecclesiastical traffic in cures and benefices, he adds :

* Cotton Mathers’ prediction concerning the churches in New England.

‘How fervently should we then pray that God would raise up reformers, who may contend as firmly, as perseveringly, and as successfully, against this vile merchandize, as some honorable and philanthropical persons have against the *accursed slave trade*. For, when Christ shall come again, to drive the buyers and sellers out of the temple, he will have much to do *with other places besides Rome*’

Again:

‘But the vengeance of Heaven is coming upon Rome, *not* for gestures, garbs and ceremonies, though multiplied, ridiculous, and of bad consequence in themselves, but for idolatry, ambition, OPPRESSION, CRUELTY to the people of God, *imposture*, AVARICE, LICENTIOUSNESS and spiritual TYRANNY. THESE are the sins, which have reached to the heavens, the iniquities which God remembers, and *the evils* FOR WHICH we must STAND ALOOF from her communion, and that of ALL OTHERS THAT RESEMBLE HER, or we shall be involved in their destruction.’

Thus we have Scott’s authority for identifying the abominations of a pro-slavery Protestant church with those of the church of Rome—for applying the warning voice of the text to the *former* as well as to the *latter*—for insisting that *cruelty, tyranny, injustice, oppression*, the trafficking in the ‘souls of men,’ the numbering of the persons of men with beasts, sheep and horses—with bales of goods—are pre-eminently among the iniquities, a participation in which makes a church (however once favored and spiritual) an anti-Christian church—‘the evils *for which* we must stand aloof from her communion, and that of all others that resemble her, or we shall be involved in their destruction.’

It was a flagrant outrage upon self-evident and fundamental *morality*, on the part of the Romish church, that arrested the attention of Luther, and convinced him that such a church could not be the true church of Christ. That sale of indulgences to commit crime was nothing different, in character, from the tacit consent of the American churches in general, and with few exceptions, that those to whom they extend religious fellowship, and with whom they voluntarily sustain ecclesiastical relations, may continue to practice abominations equal to any conceived or provided for by the customers of *John Tetzel*: and this is true, whether commercial, political, ecclesiastical or social advantages constitute the purchase money pocketed by the churches. The common complaint, that the agitation of the subject disturbs and endangers the churches, and hazards their peace, sufficiently attests this.

But are our commentators right in teaching the duty of secession from a corrupt and anti-Christian church---a

church guilty of cruelty, tyranny, oppression, avarice, injustice — a church that trafficks in slaves, in bodies and souls of men — a church that consents to, or tolerates, or licences such abominations among its allies and supporters? And were the Protestant Reformers right, in acting upon this same principle of secession from such a corrupt church?

In maintaining the affirmative of this question, we shall endeavor, first to explain, and then prove and illustrate, the duty of secession from an apostate church.

1. FALLACIOUS CREDENTIALS.

The discussion before us requires a clear understanding of what is *meant* by a corrupt, or apostate, or anti-Christian church. In order to this, it may be well to notice a few things, very commonly relied upon as evidences or credentials of a sound Christian church, which, on reflection, will be found to be no evidences at all; being common to true churches and to many of those that have apostatized.

1. HISTORICAL DOCUMENTS.

Many persons seem to take it for granted, that their church must be a true church, because it was founded by the authority of God, and by wise and good men, or because it consisted of good men, at the time of its organization or at some past period of its history — because it was founded on the true model, was enriched with divine influences, was abundantly favored with effusions of the Holy Spirit, and was remarkably instrumental in the conversion of sinners, and the spread of the true religion.

Many of the descendants or successors of the Puritans seem to reason in this way. So do many of the followers of John Wesley. At least, they evidently *feel* thus, if they would not adventure to frame an *argument* upon the assumption. On the same principle, other sects boast the apostolical succession of their ministers and bishops. The Romanists, by the same rule, prove their church to be the true church, and all seceders from it to be schismatics. And the Pharisees could defend themselves in the same way, against the scathing denunciations of the Messiah, who reproved them for their oppressions, by boasting, ‘We have Abraham for our father!’

This method of proving a church to be a true church of

God, will never become plausible until it is made to appear that men, whose forefathers or predecessors were righteous, are always righteous themselves, or that God will accept men for the righteousness of their progenitors or predecessors, whatever their own characters may be. But it is a method which will probably continue in use, so long as any thing else besides the exhibition of present good fruits and of sound Christian character shall be made a test either of church membership, or of the character of an assembly or church.

2. RITUALS—OBSERVANCES.

Either with or without a reference to the historical documents of their sect, many persons seem to claim a Christian character for their respective churches, on account of their present adherence to a scriptural church polity—regular organization—regular ordained pastors—exact and scrupulous observance of positive institutions—rites—ceremonies—ordinances—baptisms—sacrifices—fasts—feasts—sabbaths—meetings—prayers—worship.

One sect is founded and supported on the simple ground of its supposed scriptural accuracy in respect to water baptism—another on the ground of its supposed observance of the precise day originally designated as the Sabbath—another on the ground of its rejecting outward rites and observances altogether. Partizans of these and other religious sects not unfrequently manifest their reliance on these circumstances, in estimating the Christian character of their church or sect. Tell them wherein their church or sect has openly violated the fundamental principles of a sound Christian morality—trampled upon the crushed poor, or neglected to plead faithfully in their behalf—alas! they know it all—they confess it all—they lament it all. They are even loud, perhaps, in their complaints of these delinquencies; they have been so, for many years, and they see no prospect of a change for the better. But they cannot think of seceding from their sect or church. Oh! no! *That* would be the sin of ‘schism.’ Why so? Because they think their church is, after all, a true Christian church, and they thus judge, because their definition of a church of Christ obliges them to give the Christian name to all the churches that they regard as having been scripturally constituted and regularly organized and governed, and who maintain in their purity and integrity the scriptural observances and rituals of religion.

If this sort of credentials can prove a church to be a true church, then the Pharisees, in Christ’s time, and their fathers

in the days of Isaiah and Jeremiah, could have readily proved themselves to constitute the true church of God. The first and fifty-eight chapters of Isaiah, and the seventh of Jeremiah, will show in what estimation God regards credentials of this sort, when separated from a practical regard for the oppressed and the crushed.

3. AN ORTHODOX CREED.

But when, in addition to their historical and ritual credentials, the members of a church can point to their correct orthodox creed, they often seem to think that the evidence is complete, and that no dereliction of duty towards the oppressed can prove that such a church is not a true church of Christ.

A profession of correct Christian principles is a very good thing, but it is *only* a profession, after all, and professions without practice will avail nothing to prove Christian character, either in an individual or in a church. The creed of a church is its *profession*—and if it be a correct creed, it is a profession of sound principles—nothing more. These principles or ‘doctrines’ are ‘according to godliness.’—They furnish the grounds, the reasons, the motives for a correct Christian practice. If truly loved and obeyed, a correct Christian practice and a sound Christian character will be the result. An intelligent profession of these principles amounts to an intelligent *promise* to perform all the duties of religion; and therefore a church *covenant* is appended to the church creed. But what if the promise is habitually and constantly broken, at vital points, instead of being performed? Will the *promise* avail instead of the *performance*? If so (but not otherwise) a correct orthodox creed may prove the Christian character of a church that neglects and refuses to plead for the Lord’s poor! *Till then*, it will be true that the orthodox creed of such a delinquent church will be its condemnation, instead of its security. It will be the sure evidence of its guilt. It will testify that (unless the creed were stupidly adopted, without a consideration even of its meaning) the church has sinned and is sinning against its known and recognized principles of duty, and must therefore be doubly condemned. The orthodox Pharisees, on this account, were more pointedly condemned by the Savior than the heretical Sadducees, who made lower professions. The grossly heretical churches of our own day, that do not plead for the oppressed, have sinned against less light, and probably contracted less guilt, and become less intolerably odious and offensive in God’s sight, than many of the churches that rely on their

evangelical creeds to screen them from censure on account of their practical derelictions. They do less dishonor to God, to Christ, to Christian principles—to the very principles in the distinctive profession of which they glory; and on the loving reception of which human salvation depends. When God rises to judgment, the churches that ‘hold the truth in unrighteousness’ must drink a double portion, and drain the cup of trembling to the last dregs. Far be thy feet, Christian reader, from the threshold of *such churches then!* In that day it will be seen that the positive institutions of Christianity and the revelations of a sound Christian faith, in their integrity and purity, were *talents* put into the hands of the churches, to be improved; and that if buried and disregarded, they will prove swift witnesses against them.

4. MISSIONARY ZEAL—EFFORTS TO CONVERT SOULS—RELIGIOUS EXCITEMENTS.

These are often regarded as the sure signs that a church is, of course, a true christian church, and no exhibitions of its inhuman CRUELTY and its CONTEMPT of fundamental MORALITY will reverse the decision! All this betrays an utter ignorance or forgetfulness of true religion itself—of the things wherein it essentially consists. ‘This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments, and his commandments are not grievous.’ The ‘pure religion’ of James—of the ‘golden rule’—of the two great commandments on which ‘hang all the law and the prophets,’ seems to have no place even in the conceptions of those who rely on such tests.

Equally regardless are such men of the facts of the world’s history and of its present spiritual condition. The Pharisees could compass sea and land to make one proselyte. In their devotions, they were sufficiently vociferous and earnest, breaking out, as by irrepressible impulse, at the very corners of the streets. They were by no means the cold-hearted, stiff, dull, phlegmatic formalists that some men picture them to be. Paul regarded himself as having been exceedingly mad, absolutely insane, with the prevalent enthusiasm of the sect, before his conversion. The same spirit composed the atmosphere of the Romish church, at the very period when its spiritual despotism and its manifold corruptions were engendered and ripened into giant maturity. The present mummeries and superstitions of that church are but the skeletons, the shells, the monuments of its ancient enthusiasm, fanaticism, mysticism and rhapsody.* To galvanize

* See ‘Spiritual Despotism,’ by the author of ‘Natural History of Enthusiasm’—a work in which the rise of the Papal power is traced

this skeleton into its former life and activity, to revive again and to restore the departed spirit of its now unmeaning rituals—the spirit of the most soul-stirring and wide-spreading enthusiasm the world ever saw—appears to be the object of Dr. Pusey, and the writers of the ‘Oxford tracts.’ And not a few of the most zealous among the English clergy, of the ‘evangelical’ stamp, the patrons of ‘revivals,’ have been captivated by them, and drawn away to ‘wander after the beast, whose deadly wound’ is likely to be ‘healed’ by the process. If modern travellers may be credited, something of the spirit invoked by the Puseyists has been conjured up, in Popish countries, not infrequently, within the last century.

At Naples, in Sicily, in various parts of Italy, in Portugal, and in South America, there have been repeated religious excitements, among the Romanists, in our own day, the description of which casts into the shade—so far as excitement and intense emotion are concerned—the religious excitements of our own country. Whole cities have spontaneously thrown aside their secular avocations, for a succession of days, and in some cases for weeks, it is said. The population, *en masse*, have eagerly thronged the streets in procession, moved by alternate terrors and transports—sometimes wringing their hands in agony, dashing themselves headlong upon the pavements or into the mire, and imploring the intercession of the ‘Blessed Virgin,’ for the forgiveness of their sins. Then receiving absolution from their priests with frantic gestures and clamorous exultations. But did these Romish ‘revivals’ bring forth the fruits of *righteousness*? Ah! that is the question by which Protestant as well as Romish revivals should be tested. What should be thought of revivals conducted by itinerating evangelists, who carry on, likewise, a traffic in men, women and children, during their revivals? Such things have been witnessed, and a prominent minister lately preached, in Baltimore, with a pair of handcuffs in his pocket, which, immediately after the sermon, he put upon a female slave, on ship board, to be transported to the South. And we have, all over the country, ‘revivals’ conducted by preachers who will not plead for the enslaved—nor listen to such a plea—nor suffer their church doors to be opened for one—by preachers in close fellowship and brotherly intercourse with the slave-buying

with a graphic pencil, and shown to have grown up, along with its absurd and blasphemous pretensions and dogmas, out of the rank soil of a spurious religious excitement, in which reason and common sense were outraged, and the practical duties of life set aside, as unworthy the attention of the spiritually minded and devout.

preachers of the South,* and making up a common purse with them, to send the gospel to the heathen! What shall we think of such efforts to convert sinners and to evangelize the world? Can such missionary exertions and revival efforts, with the excitements growing out of them, prove that a church, though devoid of humanity, and trampling decent morality and common honesty under foot, is a true Christian church? If so, why may we not join with the clergy of Rio Janeiro and of Naples, in promoting revivals, and with the Jesuits in carrying the gospel to China? No revivalists have got up greater excitements. No missionaries have been more enterprising, or have numbered a greater company of converts. There is a philosophy that counts it a sign of a sickly state of religion to make nice metaphysical distinctions between true religion and false. The healthiest state of religion, it teaches, is that in which men are religious, without knowing why or wherefore—without understanding or inquiring wherein true religion consists. If this be sound philosophy, and if ignorance be, therefore, the mother of devotion, all we need is zeal and excitement, and we may venture to harmonize with all who exhibit *quantum sufficit* of those qualities, without stopping to dissect, to analyze, to scrutinize either their character or their fruits. But if religion be a 'reasonable service'—if God invites us to 'consider our ways'—to 'know what manner of spirit we are of'—to 'examine' ourselves—to 'try the spirits whether they be of God'—to 'beware of false prophets'—to 'take heed and beware of men';—then the philosophy of unconscious, unknowing, indiscriminating, impulsive, mystic, unexplainable religious excitement should be tossed to the breeze or into the moonbeams; and manly reflection, and logical scrutiny, and homely common sense should be welcomed into the field of experimental religion, as well as of every day business and demonstrative science. The missionary and revival claims of churches in league with oppressors will be understood and adjusted then.

Are we censorious, severe, profane or hostile towards revivals of pure religion, because we thus speak? Turn over the voluminous writings of our own distinguished American theologians, on this very subject. Examine what Edwards, and Bellamy, and Smalley, and Hopkins, and Emmons have

* The editors of our northern religious newspapers, for the most part, are just as ready to record, in tones of gratulation, the revivals in the slave States, as any other; though they cannot be ignorant that the preachers are commonly slaveholders, and that the mass of the converts continue to be either slaveholders or slaves!

written concerning religious revivals and conversions, and upon the necessity of discriminating between the false and the true. You shall there see, in substance, all we have here written, and much more, that we have not room to write. You shall learn from those unimpeachable witnesses, the abundant occasion there has been, in this country, to enter into discussions and discriminations of this sort. You shall be instructed that religious excitements are, (of themselves, and aside from the *good fruits* they produce,) no evidences in favor of either an individual or a church, being common to all the religions of the known world, the false as well as the true, the Romish as well as the Protestant, the Pagan as well as the Christian—that they are as common on the banks of the Ganges as on the Connecticut or the Hudson—that nothing short of practical good fruits and holy living can furnish any evidences of truly gracious affections, and that where love to God and man, and a filial discharge of the relative duties of life, are not exhibited, all religious emotions, and excitements, and transports, are worthless and vain.*

An almost incredible amount of labor, (and by the ablest and most honored ministers of the country,) has been expended to expose the worthlessness of '*revivals*' that do not bring forth the fruits of *righteousness*. And yet, after all, the well substantiated and unrebutted charge against a large portion of the '*American churches*,' that they are the very '*bulwarks of American slavery*,' with all its abominations and its blood, is gravely met, forsooth, with the plea that these churches must not be charged with apostacy, because they are blessed with '*revivals*.'!

5. CONVERSIONS — PIOUS MEMBERS AND MINISTERS.

It will be pleaded, nevertheless, that there are, to some extent, true revivals of religion in the churches that stand aloof from the cause of the enslaved—at any rate, that some instances of true conversion take place in their midst, and that among their members and ministers they enrol many persons of undisputed piety, including a large portion of the active friends of the enslaved. How, then, it will be asked, can we come to the conclusion that they are not to be regarded as true churches of Christ? And how can we be called upon to

* To this very point, the closing part—the climax of '*Edwards on the Affections*' is devoted, and the absurdity of the too prevalent notion to the contrary is shown up with the cool, latent, solemn, weighty irony for which the gigantic author is so remarkable. '*Edwards on the Revival*' contains much to the same purpose.

abandon the churches which Christ has not abandoned, and whom he still visits with the converting and reviving influences of his Spirit?

Answer.—Zecharias and Elizabeth, and many others of their day, were pious persons, and were converted, of course, in the bosom of the Jewish church. But the Jewish church, at that time, was, nevertheless, apostate, and as such, was doomed to be cast off speedily, and overthrown. And the multitude of converts, afterwards, under the preaching of John the Baptist, of Jesus Christ, and of their disciples, and even on the day of Pentecost, did not prove the Jewish church to be in a sound state, nor avert the catastrophe that followed. The great *majority*, including the *leading* and *governing influences* and *officials*, were corrupt, and, instead of repenting, filled up the measure of their iniquities, in the midst of these conversions and revivals. And so the *Jewish church*, as such, was broken off for its unbelief.

The Romish church, in her worst state, could boast her truly pious members and ministers. True conversions, of course, took place in her bosom. Who doubts the piety of Thomas a Kempis, and Fenelon, and Massillon, and Bourdaloue — men whose writings are still read for edification and instruction by the best Protestant Christians? Luther and the reformers were converted while members of the Romish church. Was that circumstance a good reason why they should not repudiate and abandon her, as anti-christian? By this rule, the Protestant Reformation could never have taken place. For none would abandon the Romish church for her anti-christian character, *before* they were themselves converted, but as soon as they *were* converted, the rule we have under consideration would require them to regard the church wherein they were converted a true church, *because* of their conversion, and therefore it would be schismatic to secede.

It is commonly held that the *true* church was comprised for the most part *within* the Romish communion, until the time of the Reformation, when it '*came out*' in accordance with the admonition of our text. Had they listened to the objection under review, they would, nevertheless, have remained. And when the Protestant secession took place, it was *not* on the principle that *no* true Christians were left behind, or that conversions there had utterly ceased to take place; but it was on the principle that the church, as such, the church as a body, the church as governed, was anti-christian and corrupt.

The truth is, the converting grace and power of the Holy Spirit are not limited wholly to the churches and the communities that Jesus Christ regards as truly Christian—nor to the instrumentalities that true churches embody and wield in his service. God converted Abraham amidst the idolatrous worshippers in Ur of the Chaldees; but that did not prove the idolaters true worshippers, nor nullify the call to Abraham to come out from among them, and be separate. He converted Cornelius, and ‘in every nation, he that fears God, and works righteousness, is accepted of him.’ Mahomedans and Hindoos, when converted at all, are converted *before* they secede from their anti-christian, ecclesiastical connections, but this does not prove that those connections are sacred, and divinely appointed. In short, the objection assumes a principle which would prove that the wide world itself is the Christian church, for it cannot be doubted that conversions sometimes take place *in the world*, and without the employment of any direct instrumentalities by an organized church.

We conclude, then, that neither historical credentials, nor ritual observances, nor orthodox creeds, nor missionary zeal, nor religious excitements, nor real conversions, nor a minority of truly pious members and ministers, nor all of these combined, can prove a church, *as a whole*, to be a true Christian church.

II. DEFINITION OF A CORRUPT CHURCH.

What then do we mean by a corrupt church?

A church is not to be renounced as corrupt and anti-christian, merely because its members are not absolutely faultless—nor merely because it may contain some corrupt and wicked members, whose hypocrisy is undetected by their associates—nor because its faith and practice may be, in some measure, and in minor particulars, defective and faulty.

But a church becomes manifestly corrupt and anti-christian, whenever a majority of its members, or its leading and governing members, and officers, and influences, become so. A Christian church is an assembly or congregation of ‘*faithful men*.’ An anti-christian church is an assembly or congregation of *unfaithful men*. The character of an assembly or church is nothing distinct from the character of the members of which it is composed, and the influence which, as a body, it exerts.

A professed Temperance Society ceases to be really such, when its members, or a majority of them, cease to be tem-

perance men, and to exert, individually, and *as a body*, an influence in favor of true temperance. And so a professed Christian church ceases to be truly Christian, when its members, or a majority of them, cease to be so, and when, at vital points, they fail, either individually or collectively, to exert an influence in favor of righteousness, humanity and truth.

A church may prove itself corrupt and anti-christian, by its course, in either of the following particulars, viz :

By its renunciation of any of the fundamental truths of the Christian religion :

By trampling on humanity, or disregarding its essential claims :

By habitually violating the precepts of a sound Christian morality :

By becoming carnally minded, and covetous, instead of spiritually minded and benevolent :

By an absence of the spirit of Christ — or by ceasing to do his work — the work for which Christian churches were founded :

By despotic usurpations — and lording it over God's heritage :

By wilfully retaining ungodly and wicked men in their communion and fellowship: for 'a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.' (1 Cor. v. 6 — 13.) The church becomes responsible for, and is infected with the iniquity which it sanctions by its fellowship with the transgressor.

III. SECESSION A REASONABLE AND INDISPENSABLE DUTY.

What good reason can any one give for retaining a connection with a corrupt church — an anti-christian church — such a church as has been described? For what purpose should you remain? What obligation do you thus discharge? What divine precept do you thus obey? What heaven-appointed relation do you honor? It cannot be the relation between Christians and the church of Christ, for an anti-christian church is not his.

What is there to cling to, in remaining with such a church? Do you thereby fasten yourselves to the throne of the Eternal — to the great *principles* that form the pillars of the universe? Do you thereby cling to God, to Christ, to the Holy Comforter, the Reprover of Sin, the Revealer of Righteousness and Judgment to come? On the other hand, do you not weaken, if not sever, the cords that bind you to

these, to the kingdom of heaven, by cherishing connections of so opposite and hostile a character? Ponder, carefully, a few of the reasons why you should secede from such an apostate church.

IT IS A SHAM CHURCH — A DECEPTION.

Its credentials are fallacious, its claims are not valid. It relies on its historical documents, its parchments, its rituals, its creeds, its professions, its partizan zeal, its proselyting activity, its periodical or occasional excitements. It claims to be true, *because* there are true men who have not yet deserted it! It claims to be Christ's church, *because* its iniquities have not yet wholly intercepted and quenched the overflowing streams of divine mercy, and driven away the Divine Spirit from all of its members, and from the entire human race! This is the full inventory of its fair claims. Here its appeal rests. Farther than this, it cannot honestly go. As for *performing* its abundant promises, as for preaching deliverance to the captives, executing judgment for the oppressed, pleading the cause of the poor, delivering the spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor, remembering them that are in bonds as bound with them, showing the people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sin, coming up to the help of the Lord against the giant crimes of the age, cleansing her own garments from the clotted gore of human victims—*this*, **THIS** is a work that she cannot pretend to have performed, to have commenced, to have desired, to have contemplated, at all! How worthless, then, are her claims!

Such a church professes to be what it is not. It is a counterfeit, an imposition, a deceit, a sham. What right can any man have to cling to a deception, to say by his connection with it that he considers it a veritable reality, a thing of worth, and deserving veneration and confidence? Reader! If you believe such a church to be Christ's church, you are deceived, and do dishonor the Savior, and the institutions he has founded. If you believe no such thing, and yet maintain a connection with it, you certify to an untruth, for your connection with it says to every body that you consider it a true church.

CONNECTION WITH SUCH A CHURCH MUST BE SINFUL.

You cannot maintain a connection with a corrupt church without becoming partaker of her sins, and receiving of her plagues. So says the voice from heaven, which John heard, in Patmos. And conscience, and reason, and common sense

testify to the same thing. In all human affairs, the principle now insisted upon is practically recognized.

GUILT OF ACCESSORIES.

All communities hold persons responsible for the crimes to which they are accessory, by giving countenance and support to the principals, or actual offenders. If a person merely looks on and sees the commission of a crime, but does nothing to prevent it, if he conceals it, or still associates with the wrong doers, thereby giving them the currency and support of his influence in society, and thus enabling them to continue and extend their injuries in the community, all men will hold such an individual responsible for the crimes of his associates; and, in most cases, the civil law itself will deal with him as severely as with the principal transgressors themselves.

If an organized society or association of any description commits a criminal act — if, for example, it authorizes the murder of one of its own members, or of any other person, whom it may deem an enemy or offender — if the murder be accordingly committed by the officers or committees of the society, or by volunteer executors of its will — an intelligent and right-minded community will hold each and every member of that society responsible for the crime, if they knew of it either before or after its commission, and did not do all in their power to prevent it, or to bring the criminals to justice. And, in case the society, as such, or its leading members, seek to shelter the criminals, or justify or apologize for the crime, or refuse to repent of its commission, the persons who still continue to remain members of such a society, will always be held more or less culpable or guilty, whatever protestations of their own personal innocence they may make. This weight of responsibility will rest on them, so long as they live, unless they withdraw their fellowship and support from the society or association that committed the crime, or sheltered the criminals. God has so framed the human mind, that men must, and will, of necessity, throw the blame of a society's criminal acts upon the individual that continues to give the society his support. And God himself has abundantly revealed (as in the text) his own fixed and settled determination to do the same thing. On the same principle, the punishment of national sins falls upon the individuals, however humble their station, of whom the guilty nation is composed.

Suppose now, that, instead of the crime of murder, a society commits the crime of enslaving or imbruting their fel-

low-men, or of countenancing its members, or others, in that practice, what reason can be given why the same principle should not be applied? And suppose that society should call itself a church, a Christian church — a Presbyterian church — a Methodist church — a Baptist church — a Congregational church — can any body tell why the same rule should not apply to the associated body, and to the members of whom it is composed? Will the sacredness of church institutions release them from the operation of those great moral laws by which God governs the universe? Such a thought would savor of blasphemy! It would contradict the express declarations of God. It is specially and emphatically in respect to a corrupt church that God says, ‘Come out of her, my people, that ye partake not of her sins, and receive not of her plagues.’ Of all the societies that ever existed among men, a professed Christian church is the association to whom the universal principle of holding the *members* responsible for the acts of the *body*, should be most faithfully applied.— For the nature of the organization, and of the objects it was designed to promote, gives prominence to *individual* accountability, and repudiates the doctrine of subjecting the conscience of the individual, or of the few, to the control of the many. The very business of *this* organized society, is to teach and exemplify *human duty*, and when it becomes *itself* a transgressor, and betrays its high trust, a ten-fold weight of obligation rests on the individual member to withdraw the support of his connection with the apostate body.

A church, like every other associated body, is nothing distinct from the individuals of whom it is composed. And their individuality is not to be destroyed or merged in the ‘corporation.’ To deny the duty of secession from a corrupt body, is to deny and reverse these self-evident axioms. It is to make the *man* the creature of the *association*. It is to nullify the command, ‘Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil.’ It is, moreover, to deny, in effect, that accountability or guilt can pertain to *associated* action, for if these do not pertain to the *individuals* of whom the body is composed, they can exist no where, at all.

SECESSION IS REQUIRED BY COMMON HONESTY.

It cannot be consistent with honesty to remain connected with a corrupt and anti-christian church, especially with a church that will not protest against the dishonest robberies and thefts of slavery — a church that maintains fraternal fellowship with the robbers, which is ‘a companion of thieves, and a partaker with adulterers.’ If there be any dishonesty

in slavery, there is dishonesty in the churches that sustain it, and there is dishonesty in those individuals by whom such dishonest churches are knowingly sustained. To deny this, is to deny that men can be 'partakers in other men's sins.'

And it must be doubly dishonest to remain connected with such a church, when convinced that the church is anti-christian, apostate, corrupt. For such a church, as already noticed, is itself a deception, a counterfeit, a sham. And he that knowingly gives his countenance and endorsement to a deception, a sham, becomes himself a deceiver. He leads others, so far as his influence extends, to rely upon that which he is persuaded, in his own mind, is unworthy of confidence—to rely upon that upon which he is unwilling himself to rely—a plain breach of the command, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.'

Suppose you should join with some of your neighbors in establishing a bank, the business of which, you suppose, is to supply the community with a sound circulating medium, a truly trust-worthy currency, that may be depended on, a currency of intrinsic value, and, in reality, what it professes or purports to be. But, after a while, you discover that the main business carried on by the company or the directors, is to manufacture and put in circulation a spurious or counterfeit currency, of no real value, but which the people around you, relying on the reputation and standing of the company and its members, (including such men as yourself,) are ready enough to receive, and render an equivalent for, and pass from one to another. Some of them part with all they have to obtain it; they hoard it, and think themselves independent for life, while you know or suspect that they will find themselves bankrupt, whenever a scrutinizing eye, that of a creditor, perhaps, comes to be fastened upon it.

What would people think of you, if, with a full persuasion of all this, you should continue your connection with such a company? And what would you think of yourself? Would you ever suspect yourself of being an honest man? Or could you satisfy your own conscience, or vindicate your course to your neighbors, by merely declaiming against counterfeit money, and scolding, perhaps, at the directors, for making and passing it? Or could you satisfy yourself or your neighbors, by pleading that the company was regularly organized—that its officers were duly elected and commissioned—that the forms and etiquette suitable, or authoritatively prescribed for such companies, had been scrupulously observed—that they had been very active, zealous, indefatigable, in prosecuting their business, and in multiplying

to the greatest possible extent, the specimens of their workmanship, and in filling every nook and corner of the land or of the world with them? Would you maintain that, after all its delinquencies, it was, nevertheless, a true and trustworthy banking company, on the whole, because of these things, or because, in addition to them all, it had for a long time, in years past, very faithfully circulated a sound currency, and because, even now, a certain proportion of genuine and good money was to be found among its issues?

Would your remonstrance against the spurious emissions satisfy your own conscience, or your injured neighbors, so long as you continued your connection with the company, supported its cashier and clerks by your payments, met with the company at its festivals, enjoyed its warm fires and its sumptuous fare, pocketed your portion of the dividends, and discountenanced, by your example, the efforts of those who would have the charter of the company taken away, for its malpractices, and the community warned against its deceptions?

The cases, to be sure, are not parallel, in all things, for 'parables,' (as the old divines tell us,) 'do not run upon all fours'—they do not, and cannot agree in all the minor traits of the picture. The finite cannot fully explain the infinite, nor things temporal shadow forth, perfectly, the things unseen and eternal. The loss of an estate, by counterfeit money, is a small matter, compared with the loss of the soul, by receiving, as trustworthy, a counterfeit and worthless religion. The man that makes and passes counterfeit money commits a small crime, and inflicts a light injury, in the comparison with him who gives currency to a spurious religion. A sham church is as much more mischievous and abominable than a sham bank, as the bankruptcy of the soul, for eternity, is worse than pecuniary insolvency for life.

The difference between time and eternity, between gold and heaven, between dollars and holiness, is the measure of the different degrees of criminality between the adherent and supporter of a sham bank, and the adherent and supporter of a sham church. No wonder, then, that God says, 'Come out of her, my people, that ye partake not of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.'

COMMON HUMANITY REQUIRES IT.

If the keepers of a light-house, on the sea-coast, instead of maintaining a true light, should hold out a false light, calculated to deceive the mariner, and make him think himself on a remote and safe point of the coast, when, in fact,

he was about running on a reef of rocks, all mankind would cry out against the inhumanity of the person who should continue to lend the keepers of that light-house his support, while he knew perfectly well the mischiefs they were doing.

But the church is set to be the light-house of the world, and a false church is a false light-house, and lures men to destruction. The man that knowingly supports such a church, is equally guilty with those whose character and teachings *make* it a false church. Nay, he is, oftentimes, *more* guilty than they, because he sins against more light.

The pro-slavery members and ministers of a pro-slavery church may really think it to be a true Christian church. But abolitionists belonging to such churches know better, or ought to know better, and cannot well plead ignorance in extenuation of their conduct, in supporting such false and mischievous moral lights. If the light that is in them be darkness, how great is that darkness!

DUTY TO THE UNREGENERATE.

Men who know not, experimentally, the truth and reality of religion, have a claim on us for truthfulness and fidelity in all our exhibitions of the religion we profess. Those exhibitions are most impressive that are made by our example. When they see us maintain a visible connection with a church, they have a right to infer that *we* regard it a true Christian church, and that the example there exhibited is, in *our* view, and in the main, and notwithstanding our complaints of some defects, a fair Christian example, a specimen of Christian conduct, an exemplification of the religion of Jesus Christ. But if the church is radically corrupt and apostate, then we hold up to them a false specimen of the Christian religion. If they rely on our truthfulness and fidelity, they will be led into fatal mistakes in respect to the nature of that religion. If they are disgusted with it, on account of its injustice and despotism, their rejection of it will be likely to involve their rejection of Christianity altogether, believing (as they must needs do, if they credit our testimony,) that injustice, pride and despotism are not inconsistent with the Christian religion. But if injustice, pride and despotism, be their besetting sins, and if they are intent on finding a religion that will allow them in the practice of these vices, then our testimony will embolden them to trust in the religion of a pro-slavery church, (and the more especially if we profess to be the earnest friends of the enslaved,)—but such a religion being a false religion,

and not the religion of Jesus Christ, will do them no good, but bind them more firmly in the delusions of the grand deceiver of souls.

DUTY TO OUR FAMILIES.

Some abolitionists cannot bear to think of disconnecting themselves with the pro-slavery churches to which they belong, because, as they say, they want to take their families to some religious meeting on the Sabbath, and they know of no other place of public worship where they could attend.

But the first question to settle is, whether slavery be a self-evident and aggravated sin, utterly inconsistent with the Christian religion, and whether an earnest advocacy of the claims of the oppressed be essential to the character of a true Christian, **IF THIS BE THE TRUTH, THEN AN INCORRIGIBLE PRO-SLAVERY OR NEUTRAL CHURCH IS AN ANTI-CHRISTIAN CHURCH.** And to educate your family in such a church, is to educate them in a false religion, which they must renounce before they can be saved; and the renunciation of which, as already observed, will be likely, under such circumstances, to be connected with the renunciation of the Bible itself! If you would do all in your power to shut up your children to the horrible alternative of either embracing a false religion, or else rejecting religion altogether, the most effectual way of securing the result will be, while you profess to abhor and loathe slavery, to educate them in a pro-slavery church to which you lend the sanction of your own membership and support.

Would you educate your children in the Romish church, or teach them to worship in a Mahomedan mosque, because you could get access to no other place of public worship?

You know you would not. And there are professed Protestant Christian churches in this country, whose errors are such, in your view, that you probably would not educate your families in their places of worship. But can they be more odious in God's sight, or more dangerous to your children, than those professedly evangelical and orthodox churches, where the Lord Jesus Christ himself, (in the persons of his crushed poor, 'the least of his brethren,') is scornfully thrust into a corner, or out of doors, and where not a lisp must be uttered in his behalf?

DUTY TO THE CHURCHES—TO CHURCH MEMBERS.

We are bound to deal truthfully and honestly with the members of the churches with which we have connected

ourselves. If we think them true Christians, and the churches true churches, then we ought to walk lovingly with them, and not pester them incessantly with 'doubtful disputations' concerning minor points in which we do not happen to be precisely agreed. Let them go their own way, and we will go ours, in respect to such things. But if the points on which we differ are manifestly vital points, in which the very pith and essence of true religion are, in our view, plainly involved, and if their course be exactly opposite to ours, it follows clearly that either they or we are fundamentally wrong, and that, on one side or the other, there must be a radical change, or else there can be no foundation left, upon which we can truthfully and honestly walk together, in the mutual recognition of each other as Christians. A solemn re-examination of their ground, must then become the duty of both parties. If, after such a review on our part, we still find ourselves unable either to change our opinions, or to conceive that the point at issue is otherwise than fundamental to true religion, then we are bound in common honesty and common humanity to acquaint our associates with the convictions to which we have arrived. And if they cannot be persuaded to review and to change their position, we are bound, as faithful men, to shape our conduct in accordance with the principles we profess, and separate ourselves from them.

COVENANT OBLIGATIONS.

Nothing short of this is demanded by the covenant obligations into which we enter, on joining ourselves to a church.—We then solemnly promise to watch over and admonish each other in love. If we see the members of the church astray, and that too on points essential in our view to human salvation, and do not warn them of their danger, their blood and our own broken vows will settle, together, upon our guilty heads. And no mere lip-service will suffice to the discharge of this duty, if our actions do not agree with our words; which they cannot, if we continue to sustain church relations with those whom we regard as having proved themselves by their practice to be deficient in the vital elements of sound Christian character, and whom we cannot reclaim.

OUR SINCERITY — INTEGRITY — AND USEFULNESS.

How can we secure the respect and the confidence of our neighbors, (whether church members or others) unless our faithfulness be exhibited, when the proper occasion presents itself, in the manner that has been described? We profess to believe, for example, that human rights are inalienable and self-evident

— that chattel slavery is the most palpable and deadly violation of those rights — that its victims have a claim upon the prayers and exhortations of all men, especially of all Christians — that Christian character is, in fact, defined and moulded by the advocacy of their claims. Yet we continue by our church relations to certify, to endorse, as it were, the Christian character of those who notoriously neglect, and even condemn and deprecate the performance of that heaven-imposed duty! Here our acts are in direct contradiction to our words. And which will our neighbors believe? If our remonstrances and arguments and scripture quotations were beginning to make church members tremble and inquire, our fraternal recognition of them as Christians, at the communion table, and in other associated religious action, takes back again all we had said. Their consciences are relieved. They conclude we are insincere or mistaken, for they know we are inconsistent, and they are more and more disgusted with our apparent pertinacity and stubbornness in pressing upon them sentiments by which we ourselves will not practically abide, and which *our actions* show that we do not regard *vital* to Christianity, after all! Is it strange that, under such circumstances, a number of abolitionists, retaining church connections year after year with churches whom their professed principles should lead them to discard as anti-christian; have been dealt with by those same churches, and suspended and excluded, (*not* for their abolitionism — Oh! no! *this* is always disclaimed,) but for their disturbing the peace of the church, and annoying the members perpetually with their notions which they evidently hold *as* notions, merely, and not as *principles*, upon which their own lives are to be squared, and their ecclesiastical relations determined?

Abolitionists are evidently losing the public confidence, on account of their inconsistency in this respect, and especially are they losing their influence with the members of the churches to which they belong. Just as their reputation and influence were destroyed at one time by their adhesion to the political parties* that sustain slavery, so do they now suffer, in the same way, from their support of the churches that are equally subservient to the same wicked system.

Abolitionists who have seceded from their old political par-

* All political parties in this country *must* sustain slavery; since all voters and office-holders, either by implied or express oath, agree to sustain the United States Constitution; and that is a pro-slavery instrument. Abolitionists, therefore, should have nothing to do with any political party.—NOTE BY THE EDITOR.

ties on account of their pro-slavery character, and yet cling to churches and ecclesiastical bodies of the same character, bring their sincerity, even in their political efforts, into suspicion, and diminish their strength, even in that favorite department of their activity.

DUTY TO THE SLAVE.

We cannot discharge our duty to the slave, while connected with a pro-slavery church, any more than we can while connected with a pro-slavery party in politics. The churches can no more be neutral than the political parties. And the churches not enlisted on the behalf of the enslaved, are as truly the props of the slave power, as any political party in the land. Indeed, such churches furnish, to a great extent, the moral atmosphere in which the political vices of the country vegetate.* And the morals of the State can hardly be expected to be in advance of the Church. To support a pro-slavery church is to place our feet upon the necks of the crushed poor — and upon their mighty Avenger and our own Judge, who has declared that he will constitute them his representatives at the last day, and treat us according to our treatment of them. Of course, we must abandon such churches, if we would not ‘partake of their sins, and receive of their plagues.’

THE HONOR OF GOD — OF CHRIST — OF RELIGION — OF THE CHURCH.

All these require that Christians should secede from a corrupt church. Such a church *professes* to be a true Christian church — to exemplify true religion — to follow Jesus Christ — to do the will of our great Father in heaven. But all these professions are hollow and vain. Most manifestly is this the case with those churches that sympathize with oppressors, that will not plead for the oppressed — nor testify against a system of man-stealing, of theft, of forced concubinage, of impurity, of cruelty, of compulsory heathenism, of tyranny, and of blood. To endorse the pretensions of such churches, as true churches of Christ, is to dishonor, wrongfully, the institution of the Christian Church — is to belie the nature of true and undefiled religion — it is virtually to blaspheme Christ — it is to insult the God of purity, the Avenger of the oppressed. To

* The legislature of the State of New York excused themselves from recommending the constitutional extension of the elective franchise to the colored people, *because*, as they alleged, the Christian churches did not give them an equal place in their houses of worship, and seminaries of religious learning!

say that these churches are *his* churches — that *their* religion is *his* religion — that *their* character is *his* character — is to say the very worst thing of him that can possibly be said. But to retain membership in these churches is to say that we do regard them as his churches. And to say that they are his churches, is virtually to say that they bear in a good measure his moral image, and that the character they habitually exhibit is recognized by us as a reflection of his own!

Many who would deem it a sin and a disgrace to support a pro-slavery party in politics, or to vote for any pro-slavery man as a candidate for civil office, will nevertheless support a pro-slavery church, a pro-slavery religious sect, and pro-slavery teachers of religion: thus plainly declaring, by their acts, that they consider a political party a more sacred and holy thing than a church—that while they cannot endure the spirit of slavery in the former, they can very well tolerate it in the latter—that a man whose moral character does not qualify him to be a constable or a path-master, may nevertheless be a member, or even minister of a Christian church! What a practical insult to Christian institutions—to church and ministry—have we here! Can it be that such persons *honor* the church and ministry of Jesus Christ? One is almost tempted to suspect that they sympathize with those who would bring those divine institutions into contempt. Certain it is, that this is the natural tendency of their course. Nor will it remove the difficulty to plead that men may be entitled to a place in the Christian Church, yet nevertheless lack the information and clearness of vision requisite to the proper discharge of a civil office. Our *teachers* of religion, at least, should know as much, on great ethical questions, as our legislators, and magistrates, and constables. And besides, the question of supporting the old political parties and their candidates, is a moral question, and not a question of intellectual qualification, at all. The friends of freedom require of them no test but that which the nation itself has, long ago, declared to be self-evident, and made the foundation of the government. From President down to path-master, the candidates all acknowledge the ‘self-evident truth.’ Not a man of them is so stupid as not to know the difference between a man and a brute. And all the friends of freedom ask of them is to ACT in conformity with this knowledge.

Let them only do this—let them but ‘remember them that are in bonds as bound with them,’ and the ‘independent nominations’ of abolitionists would be instantly abandoned. It is a MORAL disqualification, and NOTHING ELSE, that deprives them of anti-slavery votes. And yet this same moral disqualification is made no obstacle to the introduction of these

same men into the Christian ministry and the Christian church! Very evidently, no community that permanently insists on a higher MORAL TEST in *political* life than in *ecclesiastical* life, will long retain any affectionate reverence for the latter. The moral test must rise *as high*, at least, in religion, as in politics, in the Church, as in the political party. Otherwise, the moral test in political life cannot be maintained, and will be abandoned in despair. There can be no possible alternative, unless it be the utter DISGRACE and ABANDONMENT of church institutions, altogether. The problem whether an embodied political *morality* could long survive an embodied *religion*, is one which we need not now stop to discuss. Those who think *it could*, must already have arrived at the conclusion that churches are of little or no value—a conclusion that it will be impossible for those to avoid, who think to secure liberty by political action without their aid. Our ‘liberty party’ men may very honestly and very properly disclaim the anti-church doctrines that another class of abolitionists propagate.* But they ought to know that no such disclaimers, however earnest and sincere, can do away the anti-church tendencies of an attempt (should it be made) to save a corrupt and sinking State *without* the aid of a purified and true church—a tendency from which their own minds could not long escape, though they may be insensible of it, now.

CHRISTIAN USEFULNESS

Requires that Christians should secede from corrupt churches. In such churches they are fettered and crippled, and prevented from doing the good they *might* do, as individuals, if connected with no church at all. But Christian churches were designed to enable Christians to do more good, by a connection with them, than they could do while standing alone. So long as true Christians remain connected with corrupt churches, they not only diminish their power, and curtail their opportunities of doing good, but all the good they do accomplish, and all the good fruits they exhibit, are made

* This is intended by the writer as a reflection on those who are commonly known as “Garrison Abolitionists.” But he overshoots the mark. That body have never maintained, *as abolitionists*, any “anti-church doctrines,” other or different from those set forth by the writer himself in this tract; which they now and here republish as one of the best expositions of their views. If individuals have taught any other doctrines, the “class” he refers to, is not responsible, since it has never endorsed them.—NOTE BY THE EDITOR.

subservient to the honor and credit of a corrupt church, and are *used up*, so to speak, in *their* service, instead of going to the support of a true church; just as Romanism has been strengthened by the adhesion of pious members, and as the Colonization Society, for a long time, deceived and sponged up, and turned into its own impure channel, all the anti-slavery feeling of the free States. In the same way, there are now scores and hundreds of pro-slavery churches, with pastors and officers of the same stamp, sitting like an incubus upon the poor slaves, and upon the cause of Christian freedom, that derive their main strength, or much, at least, of it, from the support of the professed friends of the enslaved. In multiplied instances, churches of that stamp (leaving pecuniary support out of the account) keep up a creditable *appearance* of being Christian churches, merely because there are abolitionists enough connected with them to carry on their prayer-meetings, conferences, Sabbath schools, Bible classes, and monthly concerts for them, while the majority, or the officials, content themselves, chiefly, with an attendance on the Sabbath day exercises; and with a magisterial supervision that shuts out the claims of the enslaved, erects the negro pew, forbids the use of the house for an anti-slavery meeting, refuses to read a notice, and snarls, perhaps, at the mention of the oppressed in a prayer.

TEMPTATIONS—APOSTACY

‘Evil communications corrupt good manners’ in a meeting-house, and in a church, as well as every where else. ‘Lead us not into temptation,’ is a prayer that requires of the petitioner that he runs not wantonly into temptation, nor remain there, without necessity and without warrant. How shall a Christian and a friend of freedom secure himself from the seductions that must beset him in a corrupt church—in a pro-slavery church? What necessity is laid on him to encounter this temptation? Or where is his warrant for so doing? What right has he to expect the divine protection while disregarding the injunction—‘*Come out of her, my people?*’ In what way can such a person be preserved from temptation and from apostacy, but by being induced to *comply* with this command?

If he continues to protest against slavery as a heinous sin, and against the support of it by the church, as inconsistent with her Christian character—and if (the church still retaining its position) he nevertheless continues his connection with it, and thus endorses its Christian character, then his acts contradict his professions, and he makes shipwreck of his fidelity in this way. The only alternative left him (short of secession) is

the more common one of relaxing, modifying or suspending his testimony against slavery, defending his continued connection with the church by seeking out apologies for the church itself, and thus bringing his principles down to the low standard of his practice. Scores of prominent ministers, and thousands of active church members, once zealous in the cause of Christian freedom, have in this way, and for the sake of peace and quiet with their religious associates, and of maintaining a reputable standing among them, (and under the delusion of making themselves useful by this means,) relaxed their exertions in the cause of the oppressed, till their voices are no longer heard in their behalf, and they cease to indentify themselves with their former fellow-laborers in the cause. This well known power of pro-slavery churches and ministers to neutralize first, and then silence, their anti-slavery members, constitutes altogether the most formidable obstacles with which the anti-slavery cause has ever had to contend, and the prolific parent of apostacy, in its varied forms. The recreancy of professed abolitionists in their political relations, may be chiefly charged to the delinquencies of the churches and ministry by whom their political ethics have been shaped; and little must that man know of human nature, or of human history, who should expect the purification of the *State*, without the purification of the *Church*.

As this power of a pro-slavery church and ministry is most effectual against freedom, so we know it is the power most relied upon by the conservators of oppression, both at the North and at the South. Such churches and ministers calculate, with certainty, upon the ultimate dereliction of the abolitionists whom they can retain in their connection. Hence their confident boasts and predictions, that 'the excitement' will speedily subside. And hence, too, their sensitive outcry against any attempts at secession, on the part of those whom they stigmatize as 'fanatics,' 'incendiaries,' and 'disorganizers,' and whom they ought to have excommunicated as such, long ago, if they were sincere, and probably would have done, but for their encouraging prospects of success and progress in curing them of their sympathy for the enslaved.

The Christian church was designed as an asylum into which men of integrity might run, in order to secure themselves from the evil communications and temptations that almost overwhelm them elsewhere. But when churches become the most effective tempters to transgression, it is high time for the people of God to 'come out of them, lest they partake of their sins, and receive of their plagues.'

PERVERSION AND MISCHIEFS.

And this suggests the general remark, that Christians are bound to secede from corrupt and apostate churches, because, instead of answering the original ends of their institution and organization, they become, by their perverted use, the most effective of all possible or conceivable instrumentalities for destroying the cause of righteousness they were designed to promote, and for promoting the cause of unrighteousness they were intended to destroy. Universal church history may be cited as presenting one extended commentary on this remark. And those who shall come after us will read and perceive, in the records of our own age and nation, one of the most striking illustrations of the same truth. Common sense teaches us the absurdity of sustaining arrangements and wielding instruments that produce results directly opposite to those which they were intended to subserve, and which their supporters design to promote. To this, likewise, the sacred Scriptures agree. The salt that has lost its savor is to be cast out and trodden under foot of men. The well-arranged and highly cultivated vineyard, that instead of producing grapes, brought forth wild grapes, was to be trampled down and laid waste. (Isa. ch. v.) Of churches, as well as of individuals, it may be demanded — ‘If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness?’ And the candlestick that cannot be made to diffuse useful light, is to be removed out of its place. To cling to a corrupt and perverted church organization is to sacrifice the end to the means. It is to idolize the instrument, instead of using it, nay, after it has become an instrument of evil instead of good. This is the essence of superstition, and the very way in which the worst superstitions are engendered, introduced and perpetuated.

CHURCH DISCIPLINE.

The duty of secession from a corrupt church is the same thing, in essence, as the duty of maintaining gospel doctrine in a true church. In both cases, the pith of the matter is the separation of the good from the evil, and the evil from the good — that the faithful may be preserved from corruption, and that the apostates may be rebuked, and, if possible, reclaimed. In both cases, the duty devolves on each and every member of the church, and is not confined to majorities or to those in official stations. IT WAS AS COMPETENT IN LUTHER TO EXCOMMUNICATE THE POPE AND THE ROMISH CHURCH, AS IT WAS IN THE POPE AND THE ROMISH CHURCH TO EXCOMMUNICATE LUTHER.

DEFINITION AND OBJECT OF A CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

Secession from an anti-christian church is demanded by the very *definition*, as well as by the *object* of a true church. 'A church of Christ is an assembly of believers'—'a congregation of faithful men.' All, therefore, who honor and prize the Christian church, are bound to secede from a congregation of practical unbelievers—of unfaithful men. To do otherwise is to sin against the organization itself. It is *disorganization* of the worst kind. It mixes good men with bad men in the church just as they are mixed in the world, and thus it practically denies the distinction *between* the church and the world. Equally clear is it that no Christian can have a right to support a church, or remain connected with it, if the church does not promote the object for which Christian churches were originally founded. Christian churches were organized to separate God's people from a wicked world—to embody their Christian example—to secure their mutual watch-care over each other—to maintain wholesome discipline—to act as a reformatory body—to instruct the ignorant—to rebuke and reclaim the transgressor. To support churches that fail to do these things, and that do the very *reverse* of them all—(churches that knowingly admit and retain the wicked within their enclosures, that exhibit an ungodly example, that strengthen the hands of the wicked, that oppose reformatory efforts, that stifle instructive discussion, that apologize for flagrant transgression)—to support such churches, we affirm, is to *oppose* the high and holy objects for which Jesus Christ instituted a church on earth.

CHURCH OR NO CHURCH.

In a word, the reasons for seceding from a corrupt and ungodly church are the same with the reasons for joining and supporting a true Christian church. For the one is the opposite of the other. No man can belong to, and support a true church and ministry, while he belongs to and supports an anti-christian church and ministry. All the time he retains a membership in a corrupt church, he neglects, of course, the duty of joining himself to, and supporting, and being supported by, a true Christian church. He does that which, if every other Christian should do, there would be no Christian church (as an organized visible body) on the earth, and there would be no organized churches, except corrupt, anti-christian churches, to be used for the conversion of the world. Whether the final triumphs of Christianity are to be achieved under such auspices, let those judge who have learned that 'out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.'

IV. HOW THE DUTY SHOULD BE DISCHARGED.

The duty of secession from a corrupt church implies, of course, that all proper and scriptural measures for its reformation have been kindly and faithfully, but unsuccessfully employed. Such a work as secession is not to be undertaken without counting the cost, nor without seeking counsel of God, in humble reliance upon the divine aid. No selfish or partizan feelings should be admitted or indulged. The too common practice of breaking up church relations in a pet, in a spirit of personal contention, with angry altercation and expressions of resentment, cannot be too pointedly condemned. Whenever churches are divided in this way, the seceders, though they may have the right on their side, (and though the deserted church may be never so corrupt,) can accomplish little or nothing in favor of the objects they would promote. Their bad temper and wrong conduct will be observed and perhaps magnified, and the moral effect of their testimony will be neutralized, if not destroyed. And when the excitement shall have subsided, they will discover, perhaps, themselves, that they have acted passionately and rashly, and not in the spirit of Christ. Intelligent Christian principle, and a deliberate, conscientious, holy, disinterested regard to God's glory and the good of mankind, having had little, comparatively, to do with their movements, do not now come to their aid, to sustain them in their new and trying position. They are thus exposed to the dangers of seduction and compromise; and, under given circumstances, will be likely to recede from their ground, and join affinity, either in church relations, or by associated religious effort, with the same corrupt churches from whom they have come out, or with some others of a similar description. Thus the cause of church reformation will be retarded, on the whole, instead of promoted, by their secession. On this subject, we cannot now treat as fully as its importance demands, but we may be certain that the true spirit of Christian reformation is evermore the spirit of holy love, of consecration, of humility, of prayer, and of a sound mind.

As a matter of form, it should be added that, whatever efforts may have been previously made to enlighten and reform a relapsed church, the final measure of secession should not ordinarily, if ever, be taken, without distinctly stating *to the church*, in some formal way, by letter or otherwise, the grievances of which the parties complain, and stating also that unless those grievances are redressed, by a return of the church to the path of Christian duty, a division or secession must, of necessity, take place. If this communication produces no salutary effect,

the way will then be open for going forward in the work of secession, and of organizing a new church. This measure will cut off occasion for saying that the secession was irregularly made, and that it was a breach of the covenant obligations into which Christians enter, when uniting themselves to a church.

V. OBJECTIONS AND ANSWERS.

1. 'Schism! *schism!!* SCHISM!!!'—What! 'Schism' to come out of Babylon? If it be schismatic to be separated from the churches of Jesus Christ, then it is 'schismatic' to remain in an anti-christian church — *not* schismatic to come out from it.

2. 'But we are too few and too feeble.' In whom then, is your strength, your life? Is it in yourselves, or is it hid with Christ, in God? You had better not enter into or hold any church relations, until you learn that the strength of the church is in Jesus Christ — not in herself, nor in the number and reputable standing of her members. 'Where two or three are met together, in my name,' says the Savior, 'there am I in the midst of them.' And he says this with special reference to church organization and church action. [See Matthew xviii.] If the real Christians belonging to a church are 'too few and too feeble' to constitute a church by themselves, how much more strength do they gain, in addition, by their connection with those who are not the people of God, and who oppose, instead of cherishing their aims? You would not, (would you?) maintain ecclesiastical connections with Belial, on account of the *pecuniary* strength he might afford you?

3. 'But what if I cannot find "two or three" to come out of Babylon with me? Must I come alone?' Yes, certainly, if you would not 'partake of her sins and receive of her plagues.' At Constantinople, at Rome, at Mecca, you would not ask whether you ought to stand alone, or stand with the enemies of the cross of Christ. *Would you?* Why, then, ask the same question in the State of New York, or in New England, or in Ohio?

4. 'But we are conscious of a low tone of spirituality among ourselves, and do not feel competent to the task of organizing a new church.' No wonder your spirituality is at a low ebb, and that you are chilled, almost to death, by the icebergs that embrace you. How are you to get warmth in such company? The slaves, it is sometimes said, are not yet prepared for freedom. But is slavery the school in which to prepare them?

God commands you 'to come out from among them, and be separate,' and he 'will receive you.' This plain command you disobey, and excuse your disobedience by pleading that you have little spiritual life. Disobedience is not the way to gain spiritual vigor. The way to gain more spiritual strength is to exercise what you have. Then shall ye know, if ye follow on, to know the Lord. Ye are not straitened in him. Ye are straitened in your own selves. To obey is better than sacrifice. Let not obedience be deferred, because the fire on the altar burns dimly.

5. 'But by separating from the church with which we are connected, we shall lose our influence with the members, and can then do them no good.' How much good are you doing them, now? What progress have they made under your influence, during the past year? for the last five years? Is it you that are exerting an influence upon *them*, or is it they that are exerting an influence upon *you*?

The probability is, that you have lost your influence upon them, already, by your inconsistency, in maintaining a connection with a church that your professed principles require you to regard as anti-christian; and that no measure, except secession, on your part can give you any hold upon their consciences, or make them believe that you are sincere, and in earnest. The case *must* be so, if you have continued your connection with them for many months after the righteous cause they condemn had been fairly presented, or offered to be presented before them, and they had turned a deaf ear, or rejected the claim. If your duty in this respect has not yet been discharged, you should lose no time in discharging it, and not make the neglect of *one* duty your excuse for neglecting *another*. The claims of the slave have been distinctly before the nation for ten years. And the justice of the claim was declared 'self-evident' by the same nation, nearly sixty-seven years ago. It is the simple question whether a *man* should be made a chattel—a *brute*—and such a question need not perplex a *Christian* church, many weeks.

6. 'Our secession would weaken and discourage those who, in the main, hold our views, but who cannot, at present, be persuaded to abandon their church.' Answer.—They ought to be weakened and discouraged in a course of *wrong-doing*. Your example of obedience may encourage them to the discharge of the same duty. What if Luther had remained in a corrupt church, until he could have persuaded all whom he considered true Christians, to come out with him? and until

he could thus persuade them, *without setting himself the example!**

7. 'But secession, as a means of reformation, is without precedent. Even Luther did not secede, till he was first thrust out of the church.' Perhaps the church of England, the Puritans and other Dissenters, might furnish us with a precedent for secession, not to claim higher authorities, which our objector might be inclined to dispute.† But if the practice were without precedent, it would not be without command, The text is explicit—'Come out of her, my people, that ye partake not of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.' Suppose nobody had ever furnished us with a 'precedent,' by complying with the divine injunction, would that blot it out, or excuse our neglect of it?

8. 'But we must wait till we are excommunicated for our faithful discharge of duty, before we secede.' Who says so? Does God say it, in the text, or any where else? And what is the philosophy of the maxim? *How* can we faithfully discharge our duty, while our actions contradict our professions, and while we give our support to an anti-christian church? And suppose Satan should adopt the more cunning policy of not casting us out of his Babylon, at all? Must we remain there, and give it our sanction, until the mighty Angel from heaven takes it into his hand, and plunges it like a mill-stone into the sea, to be found no more at all? Shall we not be in danger of sinking with it, and of remaining in it, whether Satan ever gets ready to thrust us out of it, or no? What says the text? And what warrant have we for deferring to obey the divine mandate, until Satan chooses to give the signal for us to obey? Or will it be said that a church does not give evidence of being anti-christian until it excludes all pious

* Will any suggest that the principles of *Christian union* are violated by leaving a *corrupt church*? Those principles, certainly, cannot require us to cling to *such churches*, nor to the corrupt *portion* of them. Such a union would be *anti-christian union*. And as to the *sound* portion of such churches, we cannot be bound to hold *anti-christian* connections, in order to remain with the *v.* If seceders from such churches will establish new ones on the principle of receiving all Christians, they will be guilty of no schism, and it will be no fault of theirs, if some of their brethren consent to a separation from, rather than quit a corrupt church, to go with them.

† What was it but secession, when the Apostles organized new churches among the Hebrews and the Gentiles? Whenever the members of an old church organize a new one, are they not accounted seceders? But the Jewish church was a national church, from which the ancient prophets could not secede, as they might have done under the New Testament economy.

persons from its communion? What occasion or what meaning could there be in the command to '*come out*' from a corrupt church, if we were to remain till we are *thrust out*?

9. 'But if the persons whom you call upon to secede from a corrupt church, be admitted to be godly and righteous persons, *now*, notwithstanding their present connections, (and to such *only* is the exhortation addressed,) how can it be made to appear that their quitting the church is necessary to their escaping the divine judgments? If they are Christians already, is not that sufficient? Will secession change their character? Will it make them *more* than Christians? Or will the Judge of all the earth destroy the righteous with the wicked?

Imagine to yourself the righteous Lot, addressing this same plea to the angel that was urging his speedy flight from Sodom? What would you say to such an argument? Would it not occur to you that 'the righteous are scarcely saved? That persevering obedience to the divine commands is the only condition of their salvation? That *in* such obedience, the salvation of the Bible essentially *consists*?

But be it so, that good men may live and die in the bosom of a corrupt church, and escape final perdition, at last—what then? They may possibly do thus, because they are not aware of the corruption of the church, or because their duty to come out of it, has not been distinctly presented to them. If *their* ignorance be their excuse, can *you* make the same plea? Or are you content to do wrong, to support a counterfeit church, and thus destroy souls, so long as you can be persuaded that you are safe, yourself? Is *this* the religion that can preserve you amid the seductions of a corrupt church? Beware! It is a hazardous experiment, at best, and remember that severe chastisements and lamentable privations, short of final banishment, may punish your derelictions of duty.

10. 'But we make a wide distinction between Christian fellowship and church connection. We do not extend Christian fellowship to corrupt churches, or to the corrupt portion of them. Our connection with these is merely nominal—it is a nonentity.'

But the church of the living God, to which you *ought* to belong, is *no* 'nonentity'—no counterfeit—no sham. And a vital connection with such a church and its members is *not* 'merely nominal.' What right, or what good reason can you have for maintaining a nominal connection with a nonentity?—a sham? A 'nonentity,' too, that claims to be a true church of Jesus Christ? That is recognized, and honored, and confided in, as such, *because*, perhaps, of your 'nominal' connection with it?

Of all shams, church shams are the worst, and from their sure doom, how shall their supporters be divorced ?

To say that you maintain a connection '*nominally*,' is to say that you maintain that connection '*by name, or in name only.*'* It is to say that you *profess* to maintain a connection which you do not maintain *really* ! What right have you to make such a hollow profession ? After all, are you quite certain that a connection is '*merely nominal* ?' When Paul urged the Corinthian church to put away from themselves that wicked person, (1 Cor. v.) he demanded, 'Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump ?' What if the Corinthians had argued that the connection was a merely nominal one ?

11. 'But is not the kingdom of heaven likened unto leaven hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened ? Yes, truly. And this parable was designed to illustrate the power of truth on the heart, or the power and progress of the gospel, or of a true *church* (remaining such) in converting the *world*. And mark ! the leaven must be wholesome leaven, not saturated with *poison* ! The figure is never used in the Bible to show that Christians must remain in a corrupt, anti-christian church, in order to restore it, nor has church history yet recorded the successful experiment. The '*old leaven*' of iniquity is always to be '*purged out*' of the church (1 Cor. v. 7.) — the very doctrine for which we contend.

12. 'But the tares and the wheat must be permitted to grow together until the harvest.' *Where ?* In the church ? Or in the world ? Christ's own exposition of the parable (Mat. xiii. 38.) informs us explicitly that, '*the field*,' in which the tares and the wheat are allowed to 'grow together' is '*the world*.' Nothing of the kind is said about the *church*. And those who apply to the church what Christ says of the world, very evidently take it for granted that there should be no distinction made between the church and the world ; and no more church discipline maintained in the one than in the other ! 'Disorganization' follows, of course.

13. 'But we cannot see into *men's* hearts' — 'Judge not, that ye be not judged.' (Mat. vii. 1.) This text, as Scott justly observes, cannot forbid the exclusion from the church of such members as disgrace their profession — nor forbid Christians to withdraw from every brother that walks disorderly. In the same chapter, Christ bids us, 'Beware of false prophets,' and *because* we cannot see directly into men's hearts, bids us know 'the tree by its fruits.' Censorious and rash judgments alone

* '*Nominally*. By name, or in name only.' — *Webster's Dictionary*.

are condemned. *Some* judgment of men's character, we cannot but form and express.

14. 'Does it not savor of Phariseeism to secede from churches, and call them corrupt?' No. Not if the evidence of their corruption is plain and palpable — no more than it does to refuse the *admission* of openly wicked men *into* the church, in the first place — no more than it does to gather churches *out* of the world, in any case; (unless *all* are permitted to join the church, who desire it.)

GENERAL REMARK.

Of each and every one of these objections, and of many more, like them, it may be observed that, if valid, at all, they are equally so against secessions from *all* corrupt churches (the Romish, for example,) as well as from corrupt Protestant churches, in America. They likewise forbid all excommunications of unworthy members. They equally forbid all tests of church membership, particularly those predicated on evidences of Christian character. They involve principles which, if carried out, would disband all the church organizations in the world, except those (such as national churches, for example,) that claim or welcome the entire community, good and bad indiscriminately, as their members. Above all, they are objections against the discharge of a plainly revealed Christian duty.

It will be understood that we advocate secession from anti-christian churches, with the view of organizing Christian churches in their stead. Of this work, we intend to treat in our next number.*

* With regard to the formation of new churches, abolitionists, *as such* have nothing to do. Their duty is performed, and their responsibility ends, when they have persuaded a man to disconnect himself from a pro-slavery body. His conduct after that, in relation to church organizations, must be left to himself and his own convictions. — NOTE BY THE EDITOR.



